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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000321

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENCY MINISTER ON ZIMBABWE, PKOS, ELECTIONS

REF: 08 MAPUTO 1291

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES TODD C. CHAPMAN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a one-on-one February 26 meeting with Minister of the Presidency Antonio Sumbana, the Charge pressed the GRM to remain engaged in Zimbabwe's political challenges and to move quickly to participate in peacekeeping operations (PKOs). Sumbana reiterated Mozambique's support in both areas and also discussed upcoming national elections later this year, the future of the Frelimo party, and the opposition. He denied reports in the press that before the recent municipal elections, government officials had claimed publicly that foreign assistance would be withheld if Frelimo were to lose. As always, the minister proved to be an engaged and open interlocutor, yet his denials of internal party dissension and lack of concern about a new opposition party may suggest exactly the opposite. END SUMMARY.

ZIMBABWE: QUIET DIPLOMACY WORKED

¶2. (C) The Charge met February 26 at his residence with Minister of the Presidency Antonio Sumbana for a one-hour discussion which covered a broad array of topics. On Zimbabwe, Sumbana repeated the government's claim that President Guebuza's silent diplomacy, where he pressured Mugabe in private but remained silent in public, proved to be the right strategy. Sumbana said that Guebuza threatened Mugabe many times to go public with his disapproval of Mugabe's actions, which seemed to get Mugabe back to the negotiating table. The Charge urged that the GRM continue to adopt a tough line with Mugabe should he present further obstacles to Zimbabwe's political transformation. Sumbana assured the Charge that since Mozambique had so much at stake, it would remain engaged to support the new government.

PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: READY TO COMMIT?

¶3. (C) The Charge pressed Sumbana to accelerate the GRM's participation in PKOs, noting his meeting that same morning with Defense Minister Nyussi. Sumbana noted President Guebuza's firm intention to participate--reiterated publicly the day before at a military graduation ceremony--but Guebuza was frustrated with the slow pace of Defense Minister Nyussi. Sumbana commented that "the Makonde (Nyussi's tribal group) are traditionally too slow and cautious. If Chief of Defense General Macaringue were in charge, this would have been done by now." The Charge encouraged Sumbana, as done with the Defense Minister earlier, to identify a mission and volunteer to DPKO at the UN in New York soonest so that we could work with other countries to explore ways in which we could be helpful.

¶4. (C) Sumbana said that Guebuza was adamant in a retreat earlier in the week of senior government and Frelimo party officials in Namaacha that Frelimo was not to gloat about having won 44 of 45 municipalities in the November 2008 local elections (reftel)--effectively wiping opposition party Renamo off the map. He was candid in saying that a multiplicity of small parties was in Frelimo's interest since it further split the opposition up. Yet, Renamo's implosion was not good for Frelimo, Sumbana observed, and added that he didn't want Frelimo to be penalized by Western countries for its victories. "We didn't squelch Renamo--they imploded under the weak leadership of Afonso Dhlakama. If anything, we've tried to prop Renamo up for years," he said.

¶5. (C) Sumbana said that the opposition's claim that Frelimo would try to re-write the constitution if it received more than two-thirds of the parliament in the upcoming national elections was false, and was only an argument to try and get funds from international donors. "Why would Frelimo want to change what has worked so well for them so far?" he asked rhetorically. Sumbana claimed Frelimo wasn't afraid of Daviz Simango (the popular opposition mayor of Beira) because he didn't think there was any way that Simango could become known country-wide in the next nine months. He thought it foolish for Simango to take on incumbent president Guebuza in the national elections this year. "No one likes to vote for a loser," Sumbana said. Since Simango would lose badly this

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year only to run again in five years, he argued, it would be better for Simango to take on Frelimo's candidate in 2014. Finally, he said rumors of internal dissension within the party were unfounded, noting that Guebuza invited many of the party's old guard to the Namaacha retreat so as to help them see that Frelimo is changing and open.

¶6. (C) The Charge raised concerns about allegations in the press and from opposition political figures that Frelimo party members, most notably Minister of Planning and Development Aiuba Cuereneia, had made claims in Nacala during the recent run-off campaign for municipal elections that donors would withdraw project support for the city if the opposition candidate won, including USG financed projects which are part of the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact. Sumbana expressed grave concern, noting that this was not the policy of the government to engage in "assistance blackmail" and that he would investigate. Sumbana called the Charge the following morning to say that he had discussed this with President Guebuza who categorically underscored that his government would not engage in such electioneering practices. The Charge noted that entering the broader election year, it was good to establish such a position early-on before the presidential (and national assembly) campaigns begin in earnest. Shortly afterwards, Minister Cuereneia called the Charge to deny (not very convincingly) that he ever stated or intimated that USG support would be withheld in the event of a Renamo victory.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) As always, the Minister proved to be engaged, open, and ready to work with us. His observations on Zimbabwe, and about the triumph of Mozambique's silent diplomacy, were no surprise, though obviously have yet to be proven true. Sumbana's comment on PKOs is puzzling since President Guebuza's strong support for PKO participation would seem to be enough to spur on a slow defense minister. Sumbana's perspectives on elections, the demise of Renamo, and the future of Frelimo and third parties were noteworthy--in this

case, vehement denials of internal dissension (pointing to inclusion of the old guard in discussions) and a lack of concern about a new opposition party forming probably indicate real worries about both.

Chapman